



Watch Your Language:

Guidelines for Non-Discriminatory Language

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Preface

In 1987 the Equal Opportunity Unit published *Watch Your Language: A Guide to Gender-Neutral Speech and Writing*. This booklet was produced in response to the University's Equal Opportunity Policy, specifically:

In its responsibility for all members of the University community, the University aims to eliminate sexist and other discriminatory language from all University publications and discourage the use of such language in published and unpublished material and in the speech of its staff and students.

Watch Your Language was distributed to the Melbourne University community, and other Universities across Australia. It effectively raised issues of sexist language in the curriculum, classroom and workplace, and has been referred to by a number of other Australian Universities when developing policies and guidelines in this area.

The idea that 'among the things that language perpetuates are the prejudices of the society in which it evolves' (1987, p.1) is still central to our understanding. However, the ways in which discrimination is understood to be enacted in and through language, and the range of factors and characteristics recognised as the object of discriminatory language have changed. It has become apparent that the concept of discriminatory language needs to be revisited. Significantly, there is now an understanding that the ways in which language is used to discriminate is crucial to any exploration of the experiences of discrimination.

These changes in theoretical emphasis, published in 1996, led to a distinctly different second edition of *Watch Your Language*. Rather than addressing a specific list of characteristics which form the basis for discrimination, this booklet looks at discriminatory language in terms of the ways in which language is used to exclude or alienate. Exposing assumptions behind language usage is more useful than creating lists of 'good' and 'bad'. Rather than provide a recipe book approach this booklet seeks to expose how language can be used in discriminatory ways. This approach facilitates an understanding of how we discriminate through assuming the normality and neutrality of our own identity group, or of another more dominant group. By examining ways in which discriminatory language is perpetuated we can begin to explore what influences us to discriminate, and the impact of this on others. This revised second edition continues this approach.

The Guide has been re-printed in 2001 and 2005 with some minor amendments to ensure that contact details are up-to-date.

What is Discriminatory Language?

An exclusive focus on words and ideas can obscure the fact that we are talking about whole people. For many people, ideas and words may well be referents for highly significant experience which have powerful meanings, evoke strong emotions, and are not simply ideas and words.

(Drakich, Taylor, Bankier 1994, p. 2)

Discriminatory language is that which creates or reinforces a hierarchy of difference between people. Discriminatory language can be targeted to a range of different facets of identity, including sex and gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, age, political or religious beliefs, and physical, intellectual or psychiatric disability.¹

All of us have a world view, all slightly and idiosyncratically different, influenced by our local and individual perspectives. We all have a gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age, cultural background, socio-economic status, as well as specific and changing mental, physical, or emotional needs and capabilities. Recognising the complexity of identity has very real implications for language. It is no longer sufficient to think of types of discrimination in a vacuum: racist language has points of intersection with sexist language, as it does with language which discriminates on the basis of class, age, ability, or sexuality.

This booklet addresses the ways in which language carries a discriminatory message. Specifically, the booklet addresses:

- Stereotyping
- Invisibility and Omission
- Extra-visibility
- Negative Labelling
- Trivialisation and Denigration

¹ This list is not exhaustive. It is not the intention of the authors of this booklet to limit discussion of discrimination to certain identities or types of discrimination, but rather, to open up debate and discussion.

Language and Discrimination

How Does Language Become Discriminatory?

With surprising elasticity, language can be used to express one point, while obscuring another; to normalise one perspective, while alienating or negating the experiences and perspectives of others. 'Language can mystify as well as elucidate' (Shepherd 1995, p. 314). Language can often appear to be a 'neutral', 'unbiased' representation of 'fact'. However, language can be discriminatory when we fail to consider the assumptions which inform the words we use. It expresses cultural norms and belief systems which are often so entrenched in language as to appear 'normal', or 'true'.

Language does not come to us vacant of context, history or bias. As an example, the authors of a questionnaire or form who ask for an individual's *first* or *Christian* name, may not be intending to offend or discriminate. However, both the terms *first name* and *Christian name* suggest a bias towards Christian, Anglo-Celtic culture. This wording overlooks and alienates people from cultures in which the *first name* is the family name, as well as people who are not Christian.

Why Change Language?

Guidelines such as those adopted by this University encourage a rigorous and on-going examination of the language we use, and a consideration of the needs and feelings of others when we chose the words through which we convey meaning. Guidelines for non-discriminatory language do not call for a closing down of options for speech, but for a more precise and accurate use of language.

Employing inclusive language works to ensure that different opinions, lifestyles, choices and experiences are recognised, validated and reflected within the University. Discriminatory language can have very real emotional, educational, and physical ramifications which are often overlooked. It can effectively alienate and ostracise people who find that their experiences, and ways of life are not reflected in the language used. This reinforces a dichotomy of 'us' and 'them', or 'insider' and 'outsider'. If the language used in texts, tutorials, or lectures repeatedly silences, trivialises, sensationalises, or overlooks people's experiences, they become defined negatively by their 'otherness'.

Language and Discrimination

How Do We Change Language?

Language can be changed through a willingness to recognise the assumptions and values which inform language choices. It is not enough to adopt a new set of words. Rather, it is a matter of examining habits of speech and writing in an attempt to convey meaning accurately.

Non-discriminatory language has, in some circles, been ridiculed as a 'politically correct' silencing of free speech. Guidelines such as those contained in this booklet, however, aim to ensure that everyone has a greater opportunity to be heard within the University. A simplistic regurgitation of 'politically correct' language can be as offensive in effect as some of the more obvious forms of discriminatory language, in that it fails to attend to the sensitivities and demands of the people for whom it purports to speak.

Rather than castigating those who are 'wrong', this booklet begins from the premise that the majority of instances of discriminatory language occur unwittingly. Often people use discriminatory language or terminology unaware that it may be offensive or alienating. Sometimes words or phrases become so entrenched that we don't think of what they imply or signify to others. For example, references to *married or defacto* spouse, while recognising changes in cultural norms to include non-married partners, only legitimate those relationships that can be sanctioned by legal/quasi legal marriage, that is, heterosexual relationships. The term *partner* avoids these problems through its intentional ambiguity. Listening to the voices around us opens up possibilities for more representative and inclusive language use.



Using Inclusive Language

1. Stereotyping

Stereotypes are generalised and fixed images of people belonging to a particular group and make assumptions about the structure of society. Images are formed by isolating or exaggerating certain features — physical, intellectual, cultural, occupational, personal, etc. — which seem to characterise the group. A person may be stereotyped by their appearance. Fifth or sixth generation Australians with a Chinese heritage may often be congratulated on their grasp of the English language.

While stereotypes may reflect elements of truth, they oversimplify and underestimate individuals' lives. Stereotypes are often at the root of adverse treatment of oppressed groups. Being old, for example, has rarely had a good press in English-speaking cultures, as is evident from reading the twenty double-columned pages devoted to 'age' in *Stevenson's Book of Quotations*. Stereotypes about age may perpetuate a false distinction between 'us' (who are eternally youthful and omniscient) and 'them' (who are manifestly past it and blocking our career paths).

How Stereotypes Discriminate

Stereotyping can result in overt and subtle discrimination. Overt discrimination through stereotyping may include:

- overlooking someone for appointment or promotion because of assumptions about their capabilities on the basis of their identity (eg. assumptions about psychiatric disability, or race, or sex);
- denying someone the use of services or facilities because it is assumed that they may not be physically capable of using them, and 'more able' people are waiting (eg. sports facilities or computer facilities).

Subtle discrimination may not involve a direct causal connection between the stereotyped thinking and discriminatory outcomes. However, like more overt discrimination, it has the effect of offending against another person. This may include:

- calling on someone to represent a broad identity category, or to speak from a position of authority or authenticity about an identity position. This suggests that all people who identify in a particular way are the same, and that they all believe, or experience the same things;
- younger men may be given access to career opportunities on the basis of their 'potential', and that they neatly fit a homo-social stereotype for current management. Women's 'potential' is often overlooked because it challenges a norm and requires a new approach.

Instances of sexuality stereotypes are, of course, legion: the limp-wristed effeminate man, the man-hating butch-dyke in overalls, etc. There are also more subtle and dangerous stereotypes or myths which are still prevalent: that gay men and lesbians are promiscuous, spread disease, molest children, are security risks, etc. Classes, policies, course materials and teaching methods must interrogate and debunk such stereotyping.

The personification of inanimate objects (eg. cars, countries, ships and aircraft) is an employment of cultural stereotypes. Personifying inanimate objects as he or she introduces gratuitous sex specification and may result in an emphasis on and perpetuation of a particular sex-linked stereotype.

*Evidently, it is the slight weight of a dinghy that allows her to be capsized by the weight of a man standing on **her** bow.*

(Quoted in Pauwels, Anne (1991) p. 40)

'It' is more appropriately used to refer to inanimate nouns, such as the dinghy in this example.

Beyond Stereotypes

Stereotyping describes an individual only in group terms rather than as someone with a distinct identity. This may mean that people are assumed to belong to a particular group because of their appearance. People don't always fit neatly into stereotypes. Assuming that someone who appears white is not Koori, or that your workmate, who wears dresses and lipstick is not a lesbian, can lead to a great deal of confusion and offence if you think that it gives you licence to use discriminatory language about Koori or gay people in front of them. There is often no way of knowing how someone identifies — a fact overlooked in stereotyped thinking. Similarly, even if someone identifies as a lesbian or a Koori, they are unlikely to fit the stereotype. When individuals or groups are labelled in stereotypical ways, they may experience hurt and pain, contributing to a negative self image and feelings of inferiority.

Sometimes stereotypes are used by people when they are confident that their audience will not be personally offended. Certain jokes or stories may be related on the basis that the subject group is not part of the audience. However, a person doesn't have to identify in a particular way to be offended by stereotyping. Most people are offended by discriminatory language, regardless of whether it impacts on them directly.

Stereotyping

Accents

An accent is a general style of pronunciation and is typically noticed when a speaker's accent is different from that of the listener's. We all speak with an accent and it is through historical accident, not linguistic superiority, that a particular accent (or language) is dominant in any given setting. Assumptions made about a person's ability or worth based on their accent are likely to be erroneous. Such assumptions may overshadow the contribution an individual could make in their role at the University.

A broad working-class Australian accent no more reflects the intellectual ability of the speaker, than a crisp Oxford accent. Stereotypes about accents often reflect a Eurocentric bias, with the accents of 'Romance languages' being viewed more favourably than, for instance, a Chinese accent. Brigitte Bardot's accent was exploited and eroticised as part of her appeal, while the tones in Cantonese are often described as harsh and aggressive by many people accustomed to Anglo-European accents.



2. Invisibility and Omission

Over-emphasis and invisibility work in different ways to reinforce 'norms' of behaviour or experience. Overlooking the presence, history or experiences of others makes them invisible, and invalidates their lives. For example, implying that the history of Australia began with white colonisation, or distinguishing between 'Australians' and 'Aborigines' obscures the presence, history and many achievements of indigenous people in Australia, and reinforces the stereotype that all 'Australians' are of white Anglo-Celtic descent.

False Generics

In language a word is used generically when it refers to all the members of a class. A 'false generic', while purporting to refer to all the members, actually leaves some members out.

Americans use lots of obscenities but not around women.

In this example, Americans can only refer to males, not to males and females.

The problem with false generics, as Pauwels (1991, p. 35) notes, with respect to sexist language, is that:

In language men are considered the norm for the human species: their characteristics, actions, thoughts and beliefs are viewed as truly representative of those associated with humans in general. This makes women quite invisible in language and leads to their portrayal as deviations from this 'male = human' norm. Women's linguistic status is dependent on or derives from that of men, which is autonomous. By relegating women to a dependent, subordinate position, sexist language prevents the portrayal of women and men as different but equal human beings.

Sometimes people choose to preface their use of false generics with an acknowledgment of the generic usage. This may suggest that there is a recognition of the discrimination inherent in these terms. However, continuing to use these words or phrases rather than adopting more accurate expressions reinforces the validity of so-called 'generics', and the value system attached.

There has been much work done on false generics in sexist language. This work provides a useful point on which to focus discussion as it gives clear instances of overt false generics. However false generic terminology may be more subtle in its usage in relation to other identity groups, necessitating a broader consideration of its implications. Using the term Australian to refer only to a person of Anglo-Celtic or English-speaking background rather than any member of Australia's population is an example of a false generic. (see also page 7 Invisibility and Omission)

Invisibility and Omission

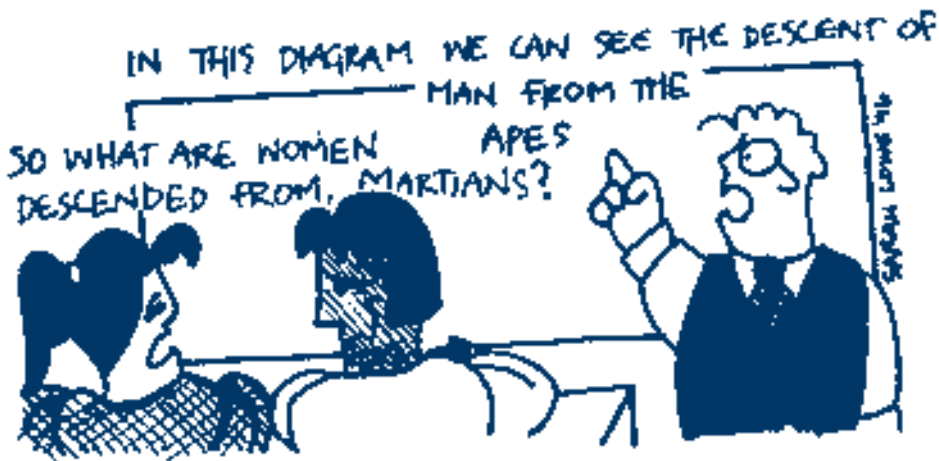
Considering the use of *man* as a generic illustrates some common ways in which generics are employed.

Some people argue that *man* is a generic term that refers to both men and women as in *mankind* and *manpower*. If *man* does refer equally to women and men, why does it sound so odd to say:

Men and women are invited to apply to join the four-man research team.

In vitro-fertilisation is a new technique to assist man to reproduce.

Man as a generic term reinforces the exclusion and invisibility of women and as such acts as a barrier to equality.²



Language constantly evolves and changes to reflect the needs of society. In Old English, the word 'man' or 'mann' meant a human being and the male-specific terms were 'carl' and 'wer'. With the loss of these two sex-specific terms, the main word to refer to an adult male human was 'man'. In present day English, while 'man' is still used in its generic sense, the editors of the Oxford English Dictionary observe that 'man' now primarily denotes the male sex and that it refers only indirectly to women.

² Studies carried out in the USA demonstrate that when people are asked to describe what they think of when they read the word 'man' used in a generic sense (either on its own or in compounds), they tend to think male rather than female (see for example Schneider and Hacker 1973 and Spender 1985). Similar findings hold with generic uses of 'he' (see for example Mackay 1980, Martyna 1978, 1980 and Moulton 1981).

Invisibility and Omission

When a journalist writing of Aboriginal and Islander people warns that:

*Their whole human status is at stake because they are treated as invisible **men**, who have through some inexplicable inadvertence slipped over the rim of the globe.*

Aboriginal and Islander women are doubly invisible, a problem which could have been avoided by substituting 'people' for 'men'. (*LaTrobe University*, 1992)

In the interest of equal representation of the sexes as well as clarity of expression, the following are some alternatives for *man* used as a generic term:

person(s)

human(s)

individual(s)

human race/beings/species

people(s)

humanity

women and men or men and women

humankind

The word *man* also occurs in compounds as a prefix, as in *manpower*, or as a suffix, for example *layman*, and in derivatives of these compounds including those ending in -like or -ship – *workmanlike*, *workmanship*.

Most lecturers do apologise for using terms such as mankind or manmade and acknowledge their sexist origins. But what they still don't do is use alternatives. The words are laughed at because they are known to be archaic, but not changed. So my feeling as a woman is still that I'm being excluded from the history of the world.

Melbourne student

There are several different alternatives for *man*-compounds used in a generic sense. A gender-neutral term can be used:

manmade *handmade, handcrafted, machine-made, manufactured, synthetic*

manpower *human resources, labour, labour force, personnel, staff, staffing, workforce*

workmanlike *skilful, efficient, good (work)*

Invisibility and Omission

Alternately, the plural form of the compound may sometimes be used as a gender-neutral alternative:

an Englishman *the English*

In other cases the sentence can be recast to eliminate the *man*-compound:

Few laymen are able to judge the qualifications of an anaesthetist.

can be recast:

Special training is needed to judge the qualifications of an anaesthetist.

Expert knowledge is needed to judge the qualifications of an anaesthetist.

In some contexts it may be appropriate to use the strategy of explicitly naming both sexes:

sportsmen and sportswomen or sports-men and women

The suffix *-man* is used frequently in occupational titles and related designations. (see page 12 Extra-visibility: Emphasis on Difference).

Using *man* as a verb implies an assumed generic usage. Verbs such as *attend*, *staff*, *work*, *drive*, *operate* and *use* can often be used as alternatives.

Since English does not possess a singular, sex-indefinite pronoun for referring to people, the pronouns *he*, *his*, and *him* are frequently used as generic pronouns.

Where the scholar has been pursuing research ____ shall present to the Council a report embodying the results of ____ work.

Whether you use *she/her* or *he/his* the implication remains that scholars are all the same gender. As observed in *The Cambridge Australian English Style Guide*, 'in ordinary usage *he/his/him* seems to be losing its capacity to be common and generic' (Peters 1995, p. 332).

Style conventions, contextual considerations and characteristics of the text (eg. legal or academic texts) should be taken into account when selecting an appropriate alternative.

1. Recast in the plural:

*When a student enrolls **he** must...*

becomes:

*When students enrol **they** must*

Invisibility and Omission

2. Use they as a neutral singular pronoun:

*Where the scholar has been pursuing research **he** shall present to the Council a report embodying the results of **his** work.*

becomes:

*Where the scholar has been pursuing research **they** shall present to the Council a report embodying the results of **their** work.*

Indefinite pronouns such as *anybody/anyone, nobody/no-one, somebody/someone, everybody/everyone* are also commonly followed by the pronouns *they, their* and *them*:

*Anyone who wants **his** teaching evaluated should submit the enclosed application by October 8.*

becomes:

*Anyone who wants **their** teaching evaluated should submit the enclosed application by October 8.*

The use of *they* as a singular pronoun has been common in English since the fifteenth century and occurs, for example, in Shakespeare's writing. The 'ban' on the use of *they* with a singular meaning and the promotion of *he* as the only correct generic pronoun comes from the strong prescriptive grammar movement of the nineteenth century. However, the singular use of *they* has persisted and in present day English it is increasingly common, for instance, among Australian university students and in the media (Pauwels 1989).

3. Reword to avoid personal pronouns:

*The student must present **his** research results to the examiner.*

becomes:

*The student must present **the** research results to the examiner.*

4. Substitute *she/he, he/she, s/he, she or he* or *he or she*, for **he**:

*A candidate must satisfy the faculty that **he** has adequate training ...*

becomes:

*A candidate must satisfy the faculty that **s/he** has adequate training ...*

Invisibility and Omission

Use of *father(s)*, *brother(s)* and related words to refer to both sexes: while it is appropriate, for example, to use the word *brotherhood* in the title of Beethoven's *The Song of Brotherhood*, if it is used in a phrase such as *songs of brotherhood* when it is intended to refer to women as well as men, then women are being made invisible. Possible alternatives to terms which refer exclusively to men include:

<i>brotherhood (of man)</i>	<i>(bond of) humanity, human family, global community</i>
<i>forefathers</i>	<i>ancestors, forbears</i>

Reinforcing Invisibility

Habits of language sometimes make it difficult to recognise when groups or identities are omitted. Standard idioms and clichés often perpetuate invisibility, as well as reinforcing cultural stereotypes (see page 4 Stereotyping).

In some situations there is an emotional or historical attachment to the use of certain idioms. It has been suggested that clichés are an expression of a culture or identity, and are so normalised through use that they no longer convey an offensive meaning. An acknowledgment of this needs to be balanced with an understanding of the effects of discriminatory language.

Stock expressions can easily be reworded:

<i>man in the street</i>	<i>the average citizen/person, an ordinary person, ordinary people</i>
<i>man of letters/science</i>	<i>scholar, academic, writer, author, critic, scientist</i>
<i>every man for himself</i>	<i>everyone for themselves, all for themselves, every man and woman for themselves, everyone for herself/himself</i>
<i>the origin of man</i>	<i>the origin of humanity</i>
<i>ancient man</i>	<i>ancient people/civilisation</i>
<i>man-sized job</i>	<i>demanding task, big job</i>

In specific contexts expressions such as 'one woman, one vote' or 'one man, one vote' may be appropriate.

Quoting Discriminatory Material

When it's necessary to quote from sources that use discriminatory language, it is important to acknowledge and make visible the discrimination and potential for offence. Using [sic] after the discriminatory word or phrase directs attention to the fact that the word or phrase is quoted directly from the original. Dating the quote in the text may help to indicate that the material comes from a period of time in which such views were common.

If the sense of a particular passage containing discriminatory language can be adequately conveyed in different words and if it is not essential to reproduce the original wording, the passage can be paraphrased in such a way that the offending language is avoided.

A third approach, is to cite the quotation intact, stating in the text before or after the quote that the words are not those of the author using it.

Acknowledging the discriminatory language used in the original source material is important to ensure that the discriminatory ideas represented by the language are not validated by their repetition.

Word or Phrase Hierarchy

Pairs of nouns and pronouns tend to become set in a fixed order, reflecting and reinforcing their cultural value. The identity referred to second takes on a passive position, and is often seen as a subsidiary. Varying the customary word order can challenge the implied status:

<i>young and old</i>	<i>old and young</i>
<i>white and black</i>	<i>black and white</i>
<i>husband and wife</i>	<i>wife and husband</i>
<i>gay and lesbian</i>	<i>lesbian and gay</i>

In sentence structure or discourse, the repeated use of the passive in the description of a particular group may create an image of that group as acquiescent, ineffectual, or possessing little drive. If references to males are consistently put before references to females it conveys male precedence and, within the sentence, it puts males in subject position presenting them as actors and women in object position as the passive recipients of others' actions, eg. *The man discussed the issue with the woman.*

Invisibility and Omission

Assuming Sameness

In some circumstances, language use reflects an assumption of sameness between people. Often, no discrimination is intended, however some groups may be overlooked because their lifestyles or experiences do not fit into the dominant pattern.

Partner, Spouse, Defacto: people who identify as lesbian or gay, for example, become invisible when questions are phrased in terms of 'spouse or defacto'. This heterosexism sends a message of exclusion. Spouse most commonly refers to married partners while *de facto* refers to unmarried partners. The advantage of the term 'partner' is that it is free of gender bias, or specifications of sexuality or legal commitment (eg. *lecturers and their partners instead of lecturers and their wives*). It also allows for a recognition of different forms and priorities afforded to relationships.

As observed in *The Cambridge Australian English Style Guide*: in using [*de facto*] as a noun for a domestic partner, Australians seem to be leading the English-speaking world (Peters 1995, p. 188). *De facto* is a Latin phrase meaning 'in fact' or 'in reality' which comes from the language of law where it forms a contrast with *de jure* 'according to law' or 'lawful'. Its use in reference to a spouse (married or *de facto*) occurs, for example, on Australian tax forms and at the University in the *Personnel, Policy and Procedures Manual*.

Naming practices differ across cultures, and are often a reflection of values and hierarchies. Getting personal names right is a matter of courtesy, diplomacy and respect. Failing to recognise different naming practices, and develop strategies to deal with them can also result in an administrative nightmare in a multi-cultural society like Australia. There are a number of different considerations:

Given Name and Family Name: in recognition of religious diversity, the term 'given name' is preferable to *Christian name* (or *baptismal name*).

Asking for someone's *first name* and/or *last name* is also inappropriate for the naming practices of various cultural and ethnic groups living in Australia including Chinese, Japanese, Cambodians, Koreans and Vietnamese, among others. In these naming traditions the family name is given first with the given name(s) after it, as compared to Anglo-Australian culture where a person's family name is preceded by the given name(s). Some people chose to invert the customary order of their names to comply with Anglo-Australian practice.) The same problems beset the terms *forename* and *surname*.

In some cultures, people are not normally referred to by their given names. In spoken language, it may be a good idea to ask, 'can I use your given name?', or 'which name would you prefer?'

Invisibility and Omission

The terms *given name* and *family name* are the least ambiguous in cross cultural use. At the University it is common practice to use capital letters to identify a person's family name (eg. Jane SMITH, LIAO Li-Ying).

Naming practices in some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are different from those used in non-indigenous communities in Australia. In some cases certain names, or the mentioning of one's name, may be taboo. Also, historically, many Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders were christened with Anglo-Celtic names. In respect for the individual, the name or names which are preferred by that person should be used. For example, the celebrated writer, the late Oodgeroo Noonuccal, preferred to use her Aboriginal name rather than her Anglo-Celtic name, Kath Walker.

Women, Children and Family Name Practices: it has become increasingly common for women to keep their birth family name after marriage or to revert to it after divorce. Some married women use their birth family name in their professional life and adopt their spouse's family name in other contexts. Hyphenated or double family names are also increasingly used by married women. In all cases, care should be taken that a woman, like a man, is addressed by the name which she prefers.

It shouldn't be assumed that a child's family name will be the same as the birth father's family name. Some children use hyphenated or double family names, the mother's family name, or an adopted parent's family name. If unsure of a child's family name, ask.

Some people find that *family name* does not adequately reflect their choice of personal names. In some instances *chosen name* may be more appropriate. However, currently, *family name* is in common usage and does avoid many of the problems associated with other terms.

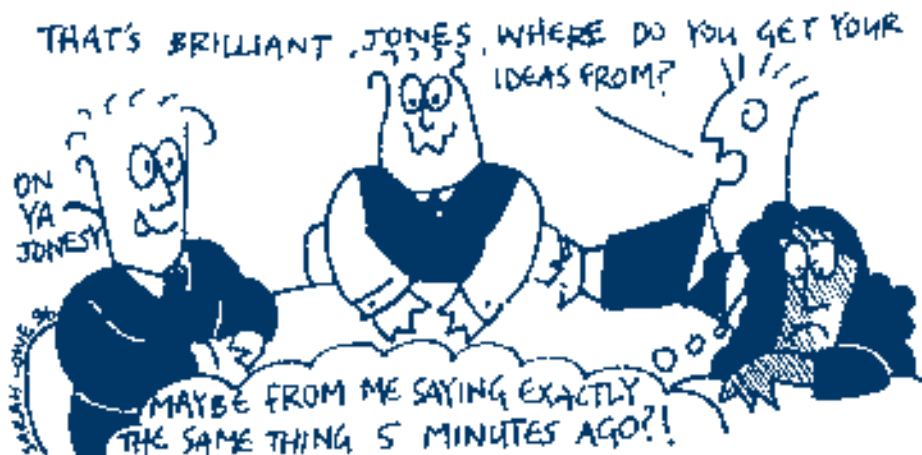
Writing Names: many languages make systematic use of diacritics or small marks attached to particular letters of the alphabet to show that their pronunciation is different from that of the unmarked letter. Where diacritics are used in a person's name they should be reproduced in English writing (eg. Givón, Wolström). Most fonts contain a number of common diacritics. Speak with your IT representative for further help. Of course, another alternative is to handwrite in the diacritics.

Invisibility and Omission

Positive Images

When presenting material and examples, University staff and students should consider its relevance to the entire University community. The experience of women, indigenous Australians or people with disabilities are as much a part of 'the real world' as the experience of culturally dominant groups. It is important when using images of people, that they are not included as oddities, or only in relation to those characteristics which qualify their 'difference'. For example, people with disabilities should not be portrayed as oddities or as objects of curiosity. Similarly, older people are often portrayed as incompetent, or with the assumption they all have the same interests and opinions.

Images do not need to contain a cross section of all possible types of peoples. Such an approach can become tokenistic – the Noah's ark approach to non-discrimination. It is possible, however, to include images of people in a variety of contexts. Positive representation can simply mean including people with disabilities where disability is not the focus of the image. It does not mean that a person's disability should be hidden, ignored or seen as irrelevant. However, including people with disabilities in broad contexts emphasises that people are more than their disability. Positive images can be subtle. For example, incorporating images of people with non-visible disabilities in a context directly related to disability, or depicting same-sex couples, or men with children and no female partner in examples.



Access and Participation

When leading or participating in discussion such as tutorials or seminars, meetings, and open forums, it is important that the experiences of all participants be represented and valued.

For my own experience, looking back at my University life, I have become less and less inclined to talk. Because I know most of what I say will not really be heard, lowered self-esteem and indifference have resulted.

Melbourne student

The principles to be observed in promoting equity in these settings are that all participants have:

- a 'fair go'
- equal time to talk, and
- equal access to setting the agenda

Participants should feel able to raise issues about discriminatory language and have them considered with respect.

For further information on women's participation in meetings, see *Didn't I Just Say That* (Affirmative Action Agency 1995).

3. Extra-visibility: Emphasis on Difference

In many contexts it is quite unnecessary to mention a person's sex, race, cultural background, sexuality, age, disability, or physical appearance. For members of minority, or less powerful groups, these characteristics are often highlighted. Including irrelevant information can be discriminatory where that information:

- emphasises factors or facets of a person's identity out of context or gratuitously, or
- sensationalises aspects of a person's life or lifestyle.

The inclusion of irrelevant details about a person suggests that the person is somehow an oddity, and that the facet of their identity that is highlighted is more important than anything else they do.

Irrelevant Information

When irrelevant information about people is included in descriptions, it not only impacts negatively on that individual or group, but reinforces an image of what people should be.

It is extremely rare that we hear or read *a male academic*, *a heterosexual teacher* or *a white lawyer* as these adjectives are often assumed. Irrelevant information qualifies the other information about a person, making the person secondary. It also perpetuates beliefs about how society is structured and who belongs in certain roles or positions. Unfortunately, it is common to read *a lesbian teacher*, *a koori lawyer* or *a female professor*. This extra information has no impact on the qualities or experience the person may bring to their role.

Occupational terms or job titles often convey assumed gender or class norms through the inclusion of irrelevant details and gender modifiers. It is illegal to specify:

- gender
- race
- age
- marital, parental or carer status
- sexual orientation

in a position description or advertisement.³

³ There are exemptions to this under the Act applicable to advertising for work in a private household or domestic services, dramatic, artistic and related employment, situations in which gender is a genuine occupational requirement, and welfare services, or affirmative action.

Extra-visibility: Emphasis on Difference

Titles that convey identity modifiers can be altered in a number of different ways to remove specification. Some examples are listed below:

<i>cleaning lady</i>	<i>cleaner</i>
<i>groundsman</i>	<i>gardener, landscaper, grounds worker</i>
<i>headmaster, headmistress</i>	<i>principal</i>
<i>matron</i>	<i>director of nursing</i>
<i>salesgirl</i>	<i>shop assistant, sales assistant</i>
<i>housewife</i>	<i>homemaker</i>

In official occupational titles, awards and job designations, unions or professional associations can provide information about the correct terms to use. For further information see dictionaries of non-discriminatory language including Doyle (1995) and Maggio (1991).

Chairman, spokesman and master of ceremonies are terms which make women in these roles invisible and foster the general expectation that only men can fulfil them. To argue that *chairman* is simply a functional title like that of *secretary* and *treasurer* ignores the exclusionary effect the use of the term may have.

Some common alternatives are:

<i>chairman</i>	<i>chair, head, convenor or chairperson</i>
<i>spokesman</i>	<i>spokesperson</i>
<i>master of ceremonies</i>	<i>compere</i>

Historically, *chair* and *chairman* have been in use since the mid-1600s. (Oxford English Dictionary)

Consistency is important in the use of terms. *Chairperson* suffers from being used as a substitute for *chairwoman* (men are not commonly referred to as chairperson) so it too is acquiring a gender colouring.

Sensationalising

Sensationalising individuals or their lifestyles involves an exaggeration of one facet over all others, belittling the breadth of experiences and opinions that person may have.

References to sexuality are often used to shock, ridicule or titillate. The over emphasis on difference which accompanies much discussion of homosexuality often includes gratuitous images of sex practices, and lifestyles. Similarly, when a lecturer in medicine insists on showing multiple slides of women's genitals and relatively few of men's, or makes comments about the sexual behaviour of people with sexually transmitted

Extra-visibility: Emphasis on Difference

diseases, or assesses the relative attractiveness of various images of breasts that are displayed in course material, their behaviour is sensationalist. This behaviour gives undue emphasis to sexual activity, and overlooks basic medical facts about transmission of STDs. It also provides negative models of professionalism and ethics to medical students.

Representing people with disabilities as more courageous, heroic or outstanding than anyone else makes their lives into a spectacle. Such gratuitous references to the 'tolerant' and 'special' nature of people with disabilities sensationalises their experiences.

Sensationalised, or insistent references to sex or sexuality, may, in some circumstances, constitute sexual harassment. If you would like to discuss this matter further, contact one of the University's sexual harassment advisers listed on the Equal Opportunity Unit website: <http://www.hr.unimelb.edu.au/e/>

Parallel Terms

University staff and students speak and write in contexts of varying formality and make stylistic choices accordingly. At whatever level of formality, the principles to be observed are that:

- people are treated equally
- no irrelevance is introduced
- no person appears to be excluded, and
- there is stylistic consistency.

It is important that equivalent terms are employed to describe behaviour, characteristics or actions. *Non-monogamous* and *promiscuous*, for example, are often used to define the same behaviour in same-sex and different-sex relationships. Often words with different connotations are employed to convey moral or cultural assumptions and standards. It has been noted, for example, that the media employs different terms according to the particular angle of an article: 'Aboriginal' when discussing crime rate, 'Koori' in relation to a political issue, but 'Australian' for an Olympic medallist.

The culture of any ethnic group must be discussed factually and in parallel terms to the writer's culture or way of life. For example, the Islamic cultural practices are often described in terms that imply their inferiority when compared with Christian cultures and ways of life. Similarly, it is inaccurate to describe Aboriginal religious practices and creation stories as myths, legend, superstition, sorcery when the religious beliefs of other cultures are treated with more respect.

Extra-visibility: Emphasis on Difference

(eg)

A businessman is aggressive; a businesswoman is pushy. A businessman is good on details; she's picky....He follows through; she doesn't know when to quit. He stands firm; she's hard....His judgments are her prejudices. He is a man of the world; she's been around. He isn't afraid to say what is on his mind; she's mouthy. He exercises authority diligently; she's power mad. He's close-mouthed; she's secretive. He climbed the ladder of success; she slept her way to the top.

**From 'How to Tell a Businessman from a Businesswoman,'
Graduate School of Management, UCLA, The Balloon XXII, (6).**

Where a man's title is mentioned and a woman's is not, it implies that men merit more respect or serious consideration than women. Similarly, citing a male scholar by family name only and a female scholar by given name plus family name gives the impression that the man's work is well known and respected, while the woman's is less well known, or that she is more personable, or less professional.

When listing names, the practice at the University is to use alphabetical order except where order by seniority or level of contribution is more important. Maintain consistency across the entire list of names.

If the context is one in which titles such as Professor and Doctor are appropriate, then Mr and Ms are also appropriate. Sufficient care must also be taken to use the title appropriate to the addressee's nationality as well as qualifications, gender, and in some cases, marital status. For example, a Malaysian person may prefer to be addressed by the title Puan for a woman and Encik for a man. If you are unsure of the appropriate title, ask.

The conventional titles for women – Mrs and Miss – define women only in terms of their marital status. Women are therefore identified in terms of their relationship to men, whereas men are hardly ever described in terms of their relationship to women. Ms was introduced in the 1940s as a title analogous to Mr.

The use of Ms is recommended especially when the parallel term Mr is applied. However, if a woman has a preference for Miss or Mrs her wishes should be respected. Ms is the only term not linked to marital status and is now widely used by both single and married women.

It is standard practice within the University to use Ms when uncertain of the address a woman prefers.

4. Negative Labelling

Language use is discriminatory when it negatively labels an individual or group through:

- descriptions which focus on the group identity such as in the headline *TURKS IN INSURANCE 'RIP OFF'*,
- labels which have been imposed by another group such as half-caste , and
- patronising and demeaning terms such as spastic, old woman, poofter

Derogatory labels are sometimes used to transfer negative stereotypes. For example, the sayings:

'They were playing like a mob of old gins.' or

'My grandmother can play better!'

denigrate not only indigenous women but also older people (AGPS 1994, p. 123).

Describing People

Discrimination in descriptions can range from the subtle to the overt. Blatant discrimination can include abusive labels, cultural fallacies and inaccurate descriptions.

More subtle forms of discrimination occur when the characteristic or identity is placed before the individual (eg. *an epileptic* student highlights the disability whereas a student with epilepsy focuses foremost on the individual). Descriptions that take away any reference to the personality or individuality of people, such as *the disabled* or *the blind* dehumanise people, and imply powerlessness.

I often hear various men calling each other girls in an absolutely derogatory sense or commenting on someone's tits as if they were floating freely rather than connected to a thinking, breathing, feeling person. These men are the types who don't think of themselves as sexist though.

Melbourne student

Listening and responding to others with care and sensitivity involves describing people accurately, from an informed position. Euphemisms, or unnecessarily vague terms patronise people. For example, the word *protection* was euphemistically used in describing the action taken by the Australian Government in forcing Koori people onto reserves and missions (Fesl 1988).

Imposed and Depersonalised Labelling

Often one of the few things people in minority or less powerful groups have in common is their lack of power to define or redefine themselves. Imposed labels are often used by majority or dominant groups for convenience. However, they are not appropriate definitions of people or experiences. Such labels obscure the fact that there is a person being labelled behind the words. Terms such as the *deaf*, *Asians*, *the elderly* or *gays*, for example, imply a commonality which depersonalises the description, assuming that the characteristic being highlighted, and the person are interchangeable.

Mental illness is diffuse and difficult to define, covering a range of experiences and distinct illnesses. However, many people readily speak of *the mentally ill*, creating a group identity around an amalgam of diverse attitudes, behaviours and experiences. People defined in this way often struggle to be seen as individuals above and beyond the definition, and struggle also for their individual illness, and their experiences of it, to be understood.

Beyond Labels

Deciding on a blanket approach to acceptable terminology may not be the most appropriate response if it simply replaces one imposed label for another. Consider people as individuals, and be responsive to how people choose to define themselves. Use more specific and accurate terminology, and take steps to understand what the terms used to define people actually mean. *Asian*, for example, is often used to describe people from a broad range of countries, cultures and ethnicities. The term *Asian* provides little insight into the group represented by it.

It is okay to ask questions, and to attempt to find out how best to make one's language non-discriminatory. Ask in a sensitive and responsive manner: make time to ask, make sure the person is comfortable talking about the issue, and make sure you are willing to listen. Listening to the person in the first place may actually mean that you don't need to ask the question.

Challenging language will not create equality immediately. As we work towards a culture of accepting and engaging with diversity, recognising the impact people's experiences have on their lives and identities is crucial. An individual's perspective is effected by a range of historical, cultural and political influences. Moving beyond labels does not mean discrediting these factors. Rather, it means developing strategies to rectify the negative impact attitudes to these influences may have, of which changes to language is just one necessary approach.

Negative Labelling

Patronising and Demeaning Terms

Patronising or demeaning terminology is an obvious form of discriminatory language. It can encompass many other modes of discrimination, such as emphasising irrelevant information, and non-parallel descriptions. In its most obvious and basic form, it is the use of language which trivialises or denigrates others and their experiences, suggesting that another person is of lower status or inferior.

(eg)

Bimbo means, in its native language Italian, a young boy usually from toddler to early school age. In Australian-English 'bimbo' is associated with a 'blonde' (as in the infamous 'blonde' jokes), 'giggling', 'brainless', 'silly' female, who is obsessed with image. If by chance the word is used to describe a male, it holds all these connotations.

Melbourne student

Patronising language is often used (intentionally or unwittingly) to ensure people remain in inferior or denigrated positions. While such patronising opinions are prevalent, inclusivity is challenged by the silencing and exclusion of a wide range of people, ensuring their voices are not taken seriously or treated with equal respect.



5. Trivialisation and Denigration

Language which trivialises or denigrates other people serves to reinforce the status of an 'in-group' at the expense of an 'out-group'. Women and their activities, actions and occupations are often discounted through expressions like *girls in the office*, *just a housewife*, and *checkout chick*. While some trivialising may not be intentional, it still reflects and perpetuates a cultural bias. Many people outside the linguistic community may not appreciate that labelling all Aboriginal language varieties used by indigenous people as *dialects* rather than languages trivialises and denigrates the linguistic complexity of these speech communities. While these languages have various dialects, just as English does, using the term *dialect* at the language level devalues them.

The experiences of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or transgender are often trivialised or denigrated: *it's just a phase*, *all s/he needs is to find the right man/woman*. One form of trivialisation common amongst progressive heterosexuals is expressed as: *after all, its just about what you do in bed*. Sexuality discrimination has little to do with bedroom activities. People discriminate because lesbian, gay and bi-sexual identities interrupt the popular myths of heterosexual centrality.

Paternalism

Paternalism stereotypes people from less powerful groups as being dependent and childlike compared with members of a dominant group who are seen to be inherently self-reliant and benevolent. Paternalism discounts the agency of the group being talked about, and removes scope for self definition or action against their inferior position. Someone with a mental illness is not necessarily 'suffering' from that illness. Rather, they are living with it, and do not need to be patronised, or treated with less than equal respect. Similarly, speaking of someone living with HIV/AIDS as a 'victim' makes them defenceless, and defines them entirely by their illnesses. In some circumstances, the term *victim* has been reappropriated by groups, such as *victims* of sexual assault. In this instance, the term *victim* allows the person to make a statement that they are not responsible for the assault. Being sensitive to how another person feels may help to alleviate confusion about which term they would prefer. Defining someone in a passive position ensures that any successes they have, or anything they do to redefine themselves remains a product of the dominant group. Historical works that refer to *our Aborigines* express paternalism. This assumes that its audience is not Koori, and asserts an ownership of both the people and culture.

Trivialisation and Denigration

A more subtle form of paternalism occurs when people assume that their position in a dominant group means that they have to like everyone in less powerful groups. It is reasonable not to like someone who is different to you. Discrimination occurs when you dislike them because of that difference. It is patronising to behave as if you always like people who identify in different ways to you. Treating people with equal respect requires honesty. Separating out the individual from the identity category means you may choose not to like the individual, yet not discriminate against a group.

Some words are paternalistic when they convey a subsidiary status from the 'normal' or 'real' term. Words consisting of a stem word, usually used alone for a man, with a gender-marked suffix such as -ess, -ette, -trix, and -ienne convey the idea that women are deviations from a male 'norm'. The suffixes in the following examples distract attention from the nature of the occupation itself; an authoress is somehow more than just a female author, with the work of the woman who carries this title demeaned, or defined as qualitatively different to that of the 'real' author.

<i>waitress</i>	<i>waiter/waiting staff</i>
<i>manageress</i>	<i>manager</i>
<i>usherette</i>	<i>usher, attendant</i>
<i>comediienne</i>	<i>comedian</i>

Terms of Endearment

Using endearments for people unknown to you, or in situations that do not call for intimacy is patronising. Endearments such as *dear*, *love*, *sweetie*, for women, or *gran* for an older person, are inappropriate where there is not an established familiarity. Some terms may be appropriate in certain contexts and environments, and not in others.

Used inappropriately, terms of endearment belittle the other person by sexualising or infantilising them. When addressing someone it is most appropriate to use that person's name or title. If they are unknown, terms such as 'madam' or 'sir' can sometimes be used or, if necessary, no name at all.

Trivialisation and Denigration

So-called Compliments

Insults are often couched as compliments, or reflect positively on one aspect of a person or their work, at the expense of another.

You're not just a pretty face.

You're such a girl/woman.

Her hips are screaming for twins.

Sometimes they imply that the recipient is actually less competent than the 'norm'.

You've done well for being a mother and wife.

He's amazing for a person in a wheelchair.

An excellent test of the validity of a compliment is to reframe it in terms of an 'in-group' member. Would you say to a sighted colleague:

You've done well for someone who can see.

Anything that starts out, *This may sound sexist, racist...* is sure to be exactly that.

Discriminatory Humour

Discriminatory humour is particularly offensive. Regardless of how innocently intended at least some, if not all, of the audience will end up offended. Jokes made at the expense of racial or cultural groups depend on, and in turn propagate, demeaning stereotypes. Common stereotypes perpetuated by ethnic or racial jokes are associated with daily lifestyle (eg. food, clothing and customs), family structure, accents, characteristics such as thrift and greed, mental capacity and work ethic.

Unwelcome comments and jokes including offensive cartoons, may, in some circumstances, constitute harassment. If you would like to discuss this matter further, contact the Equal Opportunity Unit, Human Resources.

There are those who have some idea of what discriminatory humour is, but think it is a trivial problem and therefore caricature it. Words are often used in a supposedly humorous way to undermine real concerns regarding the effects of discriminatory language. For example, words which do not actually contain the false generic *man* are altered in an attempt at humour: *huntsperson* spider. Words such as *manage*, *manipulate*, and *manual* derive from the Latin word *manus* 'hand', similarly, *manufacturer*, *manuscript*, and *human* are derived from *humanus* 'human'.

Trivialisation and Denigration

Humour can play a broad and powerful role in shaping individual attitudes and socio-political structures and in regulating interpersonal dynamics. Many women, for example, are weary of sexist humour and of being accused of humourlessness if they don't respond appreciatively. Such jokes reveal a displaced contempt for women and as Crawford (1995, p. 135) comments, 'One simple reason women as a group may appear less humorous is that they are unwilling to participate in their own denigration.'

Conclusion

Discrimination, whether intentional or otherwise, affects everyone. Discriminatory language is an insult to those discriminated against. It impacts upon the work environment, limiting access to free speech, and equal participation. Non-inclusive language is unprofessional and works against an ethos of 'excellence', damaging the quality of work produced within the University by silencing the presence and voice of many in its community.

If you have concerns about the use of discriminatory language in your work or educational environment, you can contact an Anti-Discrimination Advisor to discuss the issue in confidence.

Contact details for Advisors can be found on the Equal Opportunity website at:
<http://www.hr.unimelb.edu.au/equal-opportunity/>

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